

Merritt, Depies, Turenne cap year with solid efforts

Written by MITCH MAERSCH
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Although they failed to score team points, three local athletes turned in solid performances in Division 2 and 3 events at last weekend's WIAA state track and field meet in La Crosse.

Cedar Grove-Belgium got strong races from Joel Merritt and Kiera Depies, and Ozaukee's Brandon Turenne capped a memorable season in the long jump.

Merritt, a junior, turned in a personal-best time of 4 minutes, 27.11 seconds on his way to 11th place in the boys' 1,600-meter run. The time was four seconds faster than his previous best.

"Joel stepped it up and showed he will be a force to be reckoned with next year," Rockets coach Steve Moore said.

"It was his first year with the bigger dogs, so to get down there and do something like that was great."

Merritt was less than a half-second out of eighth place, the last of the scoring spots. Matt McKenna of Madison Edgewood won the race in 4:12.12.

The Rockets moved from Division 3 to Division 2 this season and went up against teams from schools two and three times larger than their own. As a result, only two Cedar Grove-Belgium athletes qualified for state, down from 19 last season.

Depies, a sophomore, ran in a rainstorm that slowed the pack in the girls' 800 run, but she still shined, finishing 16th in 2:28.08.

"She looked better running than I've seen her all year," Moore said. "At the end, she had some hop to her step. She wasn't worn out."

Depies was seeded 17th in the event.

"Without that kind of weather, she would have been at her seed time or a little better," Moore said.

Kim Hennings of Kiel won the race in 2:15.54.

Merritt and Depies will both return next year and can tell their teammates how much tougher running a Division 2 state race is compared to Division 3, Moore said.

"You've got to believe what these kids are telling you. It takes this kind of work," he said.

The Rockets could move back to Division 3 next season. This year's Division 3 cutoff was 312 students, and

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the school had 317. In any case, this season was a success.

“We got better from the start of the year to the end of the year. That’s your objective,” Moore said.

Turenne, a senior, leaped 19 feet, 1 inch to place 15th place in the Division 3 boys’ long jump.

Ozaukee coach Chris Weavers said Turenne told him, “I felt like my speed was good, but I just didn’t have my springs today.”

Turenne turned it up a notch to qualify for state. He jumped in the 17-foot range early in the season and reached 18 feet at the conference meet.

At the sectional, he stretched it to a personal-best 19-11-1/4.

“We were all happy that he got to state. I think it is an experience that he will never forget,” Weavers said.

Spencer Olejniczak of Thorp won the long jump at 21-9-1/2.